
Comanche Lookout Park Improvements Phase II / Semmes Branch Library

Public Input Workshop

City of San Antonio purchased 96 acres of undeveloped land in the far northeast edge of the city in 1994. This purchase took place due to the historic significance, distinctive topography, and the urging of area residents. The site has the fourth highest elevation in Bexar County and overlooks the historic Camino Real (King's Highway) route, now known as Nacogdoches Road. The site received the name "Comanche Lookout" because Indians would lie in wait at the hilltop for unsuspecting travelers on the Camino Real and swoop down on them, stealing supplies, horses, and committing mayhem. The property was later owned by a retired army colonel, Edward Coppock, who some thought eccentric. The colonel constructed several stone structures on the hilltop in the 1920s and 30s that included a residence, tower, and outbuildings. Unfortunately, a later owner demolished most of the Coppock structures with only the four-story stone tower and the foundation of Mr. Coppock's residence the only structures remaining on the site today.

The site has dramatic views of a large portion of San Antonio from the clearing on the hilltop that is the old house foundation. There are areas of severe erosion on the southern hillside that were created by recreational vehicles prior to acquisition of the property by the City. Adjacent development consists of single family residential to the north and west, and primarily commercial to the south and east.

The site is divided into three distinct land types, giving direction to the uses of the land.



Upland Forest/ Hill Top

The eastern half of the site is made up of the hilltop and is a heavily wooded upland forest averaging 20-25' in height and typical of this location at the edge of the hill country. The main tree species are live oak, cedar elm, western red cedar, and persimmon. Some live oaks on the site are very large and have reached 35' height. The hill of dense woods is home to numerous wildlife and vegetative species and the inherent natural qualities offer tremendous value in its current state.



Bottomland Forrest and Prairie

This area of the site contains drainage easements that begin at Rocky Creek Street and extend west and south around the hill. This drainage eventually turns into the headwaters of an unnamed creek located about 500 feet from Nacogdoches Road. The Bottomland forest averages 15-20' in height and contains Huisache, Mesquite, Salt Cedar, Western Red Cedar, and Sumac. Within the bottomland forest about 40% of the area is native meadows that contain unique prairie habitat and offer excellent cover for wildlife.

**Developable Area**

The developable area of the site consists of approximately 5 acres on the western side of the site. Access to these areas would be from Nacogdoches Road and Judson Road. This site has been cleared of most native plants, is undeveloped and used for agricultural purposes.

**Existing Park Master Plan**

In 1994, a master plan was prepared by Laffoon Associates for development of the site as a “natural area”. This plan proposed a park center (possibly a historic house moved to the site), parking areas, trails generally following existing unimproved paths to avoid excessive tree clearing, a service road/accessible route to the hilltop, a “meadow” with native grasses and wildflowers, restoration of the stone tower, development of Coppock’s castle foundation as an outdoor classroom for use by the public and nearby elementary school, re-creation of a small pond and associated wetlands, perimeter buffer planting, restrooms and playgrounds.

An archaeological investigation of the site was conducted by the University of Texas at San Antonio Center for Archaeological Research in 1998. Several artifacts were found and archaeologically significant sites were identified. These sites were categorized as ranging from minimally to highly disturbed. The report suggests that future development at or near these sites should be approached with care



Master Plan

With the master plan and archaeological information as guides and with limited funding, Phase I Improvements were subsequently constructed on the site in 1999 - 2000. This work consisted of a visitor parking lot, service road to the hilltop, multi-purpose trails, drinking fountains and trail signage.



Phase One Development

About six months after completion of the Phase One, a decision was made by the City to locate a branch library on the southwestern end of the park site, near the intersection of Nacogdoches Road and Judson Road. It was determined that this area would cause little negative impact on development of the park because it was located on the edge of the site and had little existing vegetation other than grass.

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Public Input Workshop

Public Input Workshop Process

Sixteen citizens attended a public meeting on Wednesday April 9, 2003 at Fox Run Elementary School to discuss the pending development of the Semmes Library and the second Phase Development of Comanche Lookout Park. A brief project and site overview was provided by the consultant that detailed the park master plan that was completed in 1994, the elements of the first phase development completed in 2000, the location of the proposed library at the west end of the site, and staff thoughts on collaborative possibilities between the park and library. During the presentation the citizens were informed of some of the limitations of the site due to the inherent qualities of the natural features and functions associated with the property. Therefore, while all thoughts and ideas would be considered, some ideas may not be feasible for this particular location.

Issues Identified

Participants at the workshop were asked to identify concerns or issues associated with the development of the park and library. This “brainstorming” exercise led to the identification of the following items, issues and areas of concern.

Park

- Dog waste
- Vandalism
- Following rules
- Lack of benches
- Lack of orientation map on the site
- Lack of mileage markers
- Conflicts between bicycles and pedestrians
- Need separate bicycle trail
- Need additional parking
- Hillside erosion
- Late night parking on north side of park

Library

- Use native plant materials
- Lots of trees in parking area
- Respect the site during construction

Goals / Visions

Finally those present at the meeting were asked about the goals and visions they had for the future use and development of the site. Four questions were asked to set the tone for this portion of the discussion:

1. What additional facilities would you like to see in the park?
2. You are on the site: What would you like to experience or what activity are you engaged in?
3. Your child or a visiting friend is on the site: What would you like them to experience or be doing?
4. How would you like the library to function on the park?

After developing the list of goals and visions, everyone was asked to vote on what they saw as the top priorities to consider. Each participant was given three votes representing their three priorities. Red votes represented the top priority, a blue vote was the second highest priority and a yellow vote was the third highest priority, and weighted scores of 3, 2, and 1 were assigned to each vote respectively. Each individual was instructed that they could distribute their own votes in any manner they desired. The total score for each of the items receiving votes is indicated below.

- Building must look like it belongs on the park (12)
- Combine park and library facilities “common uses” (8)
- Blend library building with the land (8)
- Limit hilltop development (6)
- Trails to connect library to park (6)
- Tower rehabilitation (5)
- Preserve hilltop trees (4)
- Additional trails (not library) (4)
- Buffer between park and residences (3)
- Bio engineering of trail materials (3)
- Boardwalk over wetlands (3)
- Create more shade (3)
- Security concerns (vandalism) (3)
- Wetlands (2)
- Incorporate park center into library (2)
- Limit people activity in park (2)
- Glass in library to take advantage of views (2)
- Interpretation of unique vegetation (2)
- Acquire TxDOT funding for bike trail (1)
- Toilet location not on hill top
- Restroom in library accessible from park
- Integrate park and library
- Leave the hill alone
- Limit use of outdoor space because of noise
- Shade direct sun at library
- Restrooms in visible and accessible places
- Erosion repair